

Could Idaho Be America's Next Great Wine Region?

By Ted Loos , November 4, 2015



Koenig Vineyard and Distillery

Move over, potatoes. It's wine's time to shine.

If you've already acknowledged that the Northwest corner of our great United States is a hotbed for fine wine—Willamette Pinots, Walla Walla Cabs, and the like—then how much of a stretch is it to accept next-door neighbor Idaho as the source for serious-minded vino?

Ok, it's a big stretch. But breathe. And say it with me: Idaho wine.

I say it cautiously, because I have only tasted a dozen of them, but the state formerly known for its potatoes might be pretty good at growing grapes, too.

The Snake River Valley AVA—that stands for American Viticultural Appellation, government-speak for official wine zone—is partly in Idaho (just to the south of Boise), partly in neighboring Oregon (but the other side of the state from the more famous Willamette). And it's the most established wine zone in the Gem State.

You'd never guess the grapes grown there: Viognier (the white Rhone beauty), Tempranillo (Rioja's mainstay), and Malbec (the great South American hope) seem to be the ones that are really thriving, even though the three types are usually not found anywhere near each other.

If they met at a party, there would be an awkward silence.

I found one of each that I really liked. Koenig Vineyards Snake River Valley Williamson Vineyard Viognier 2012 (\$15) has a fairly high alcohol content for a white wine, 14.9%, but it uses that big frame to deliver an unctuousness that is characteristic of this grape. It has a lovely white peach character, with a hint of the spicy baby powder nose Viognier often has. There may be a touch of residual sugar here, a sweetness used to good effect.

Huston Vineyards Snake River Valley Malbec 2012 (\$29) has a very pure, fresh fruit profile, as opposed to a few other Idaho reds I had, which had been over-oaked. Ample raspberry flavor, a lovely weight on the palate, and a pleasant finish make this a winner—how about serving it alongside a Moroccan tagine with dried apricots?

The soft plum and cherry tastes, and the hint of coffee, in the Sawtooth Snake River Valley Classic Fly Series Tempranillo 2012 (\$25), aren't exactly Rioja-like, but there is plenty to appreciate in this well-made wine, including a weighty texture.

Are we ready to call Idaho the Next Great Northwest Wine Region? Maybe. The highest compliment I can give is that I am ready, willing, and able to taste more of them.



IDAHO WINE
COMMISSION

WWW.IDAHOWINES.ORG | 821 W STATE STREET, BOISE ID 83702 | 208-332-1538 | INFO@IDAHOWINES.ORG